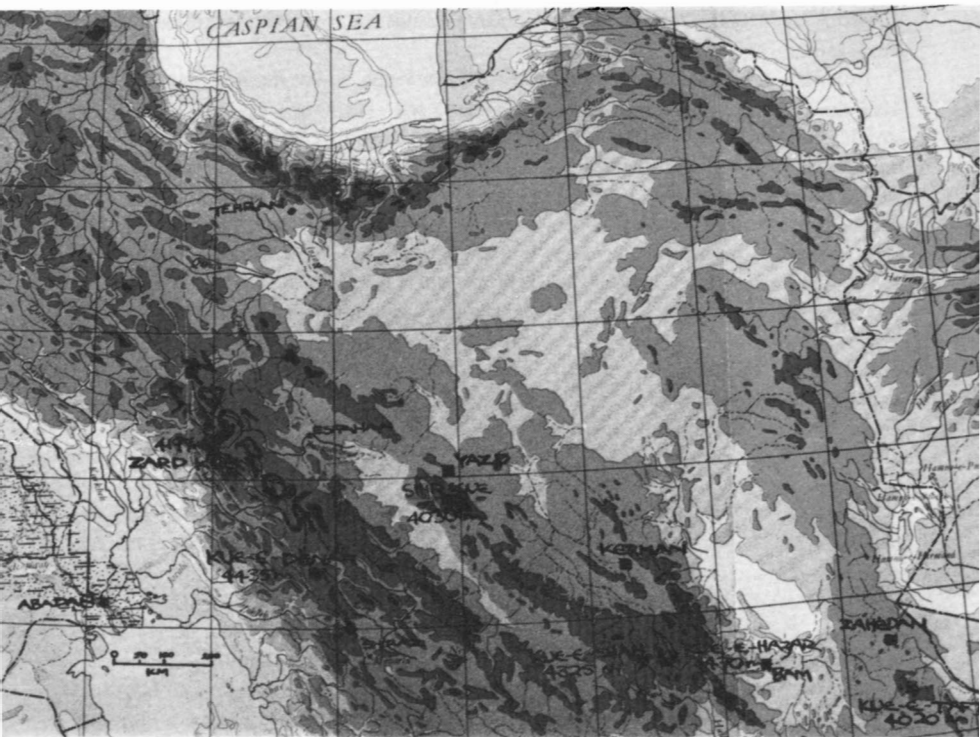


tens of years as a stance, to take the rest of the party up. The frequent rains during the past weeks must have loosened the foundation round the slab and it suddenly crashed down, burying all 3 climbers.

On hearing the details I had to think of an incident many years ago when I saw a horizontal slab, much smaller than the one which had caused this accident, and tried to put my hand on it to use it as a stance. I still remember my terror when I felt it moving downwards. I tried to ease it back into the old position and succeeded but I know now, hearing the tragic story, how lucky I had been at the time.

92 The 4000m peaks of southern Iran (This and next 8 photos and maps: G. Sheridan)



Some 4000 metre peaks of southern Iran

Guy Sheridan

In January and February 1975 I spent many hours browsing through past *Alpine Journals* and other books in the Alpine Club library in an attempt to gather information about the mountains of Southern Iran. I was largely unsuccessful and when my wife and I left UK in April the same year we were hardly more knowledgeable about the topography of Southern Iran than when we first looked at the *Times Atlas*. Nonetheless the 2½ years that I had on loan service to the Imperial Iranian Marines provided me with plenty of opportunities to gain knowledge at first hand. I hope that this short article will enable others who find themselves in Iran and want to visit the higher peaks of that vast country to do so without being confronted with similar frustrations.

Although based at Bushehr on the shores of the Persian Gulf, we were fortunate in having a house in Shiraz, which at 1500m above sea level provided a most welcome relief from the heat, humidity and smells of the Gulf littoral. It also provided me with an excellent 'jump off' point for exploration of the Zagros range and the mountains further to the E. My forays into the hills were made possible by the forbearance of my wife; that great British product the Range Rover; and my good fortune in having access to reliable maps. I had brought all my mountaineering equipment out to Iran from England which was fortunate because there were only 2 climbing shops and they were in Tehran, 1000km to the N.

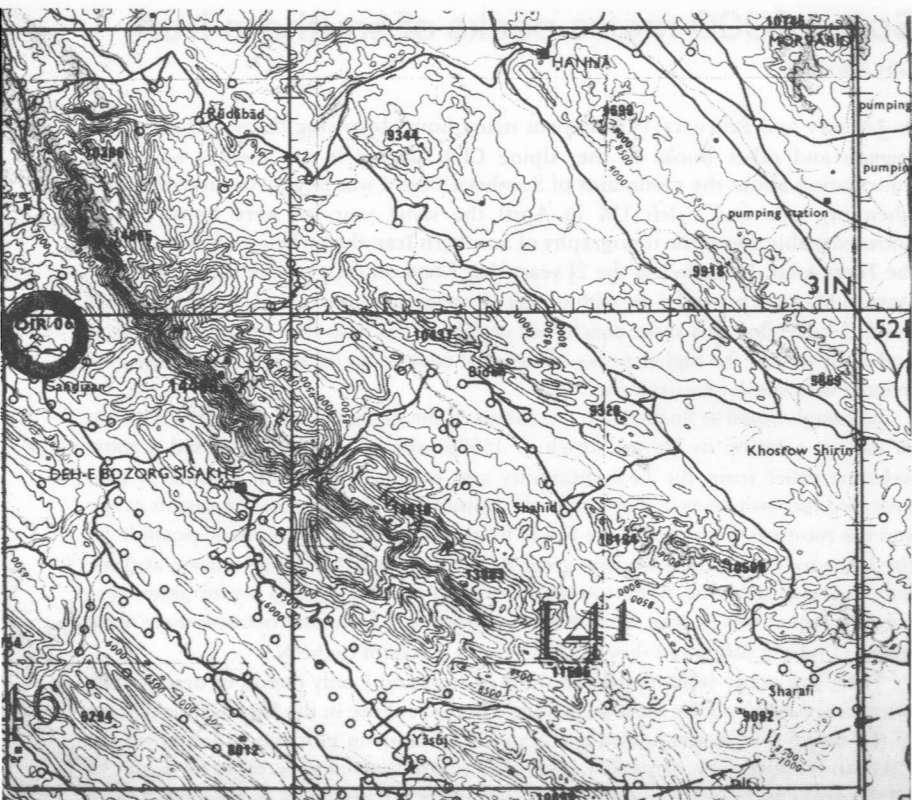
There are many 4000m peaks in the S of Iran and I only intend to describe the most interesting and the most accessible. There are those in the Zagros range, those in the range S of Kerman, and a volcano that stands in glorious isolation on the Pakistan frontier. The maps that I was able to use showed differences in height of all the peaks and used both units of measurement and not being in possession of an altimeter I was unable to arbitrate between the 2. I have quoted heights in metres which may not be correct.

The Zagros range

Zagros is the striking, almost mythological sounding name for the second most important mountain range in Iran. The atlas shows the range stretching from Kurdistan in NW Iran, in a great chain over 1000km long to a point between Shiraz and Kerman where it merges with the high inland plateaux. In fact Zagros at its most majestic is only about 600km long and it forms the barrier between the low lying plains that border Iraq and the high deserts to the N and E. From the snows of Zagros flow the largest of Iran's rivers upon which are located many of the country's heavier industries. The high pastures of the range are the summer home of the colourful Qashgai and Bakhtiari tribes and their animals and are the inspiration for their wonderful rugs. (See *AJ* 83 102.)

Kuh-e-Denar 4435m

Kuh-e-Denar is the highest mountain in the Zagros. It is an astonishingly long ridge that stretches for over 50km which is broken about midway by a pass at 3200m. The ridge, otherwise, has an average height of 4000m. There are several peaks that jut out of this ridge and the highest one is among a group of 3 at 4435m. To the local people it is a small triangular knoll on the ridge above Sesakht (Pt

93 *Kuh e Denar*

4302m) which is known as Denar although in reality this name refers to the whole massif.

The S aspect of Denar is an enormous precipice which averages 1400m in height. Apart from the slopes above Sesakht and up to the central pass this precipice extends the length of the mountain and is at its steepest in the northernmost half. The N side is less steep overall and there are many long ridges that lead up to the main ridge line. This side is less accessible and reaching it would involve laboriously long jeep journeys over bad tracks. It is on the S side that the network of roads makes this fabulous mountain very accessible as it only involves 3 hours driving from the International Airport at Shiraz.

Sesakht village is an ideal spot from which to climb the mountain by the easiest routes and it is connected by 30km of reasonable dirt road to Yasuj which is the largest town in the area. Yasuj is 160km NW of Shiraz by a good dirt road which passes through interesting wooded countryside and traverses 2 passes of 2600m. There is a comfortable tourist inn at Yasuj and also a petrol station.

The first snows of winter fall on Denar in November and the weather becomes unpredictable until the middle of May when long sunny days may be enjoyed. The snow lies down to about 2200m in mid winter and any approach to the mountain at this time is best done on skis. By mid July the S side of Denar is virtually free of snow except for small pockets in gullies. On the other side high up on the ridge



94 *On the ridge leading to Kuh e Denar, Pt 4106 behind*



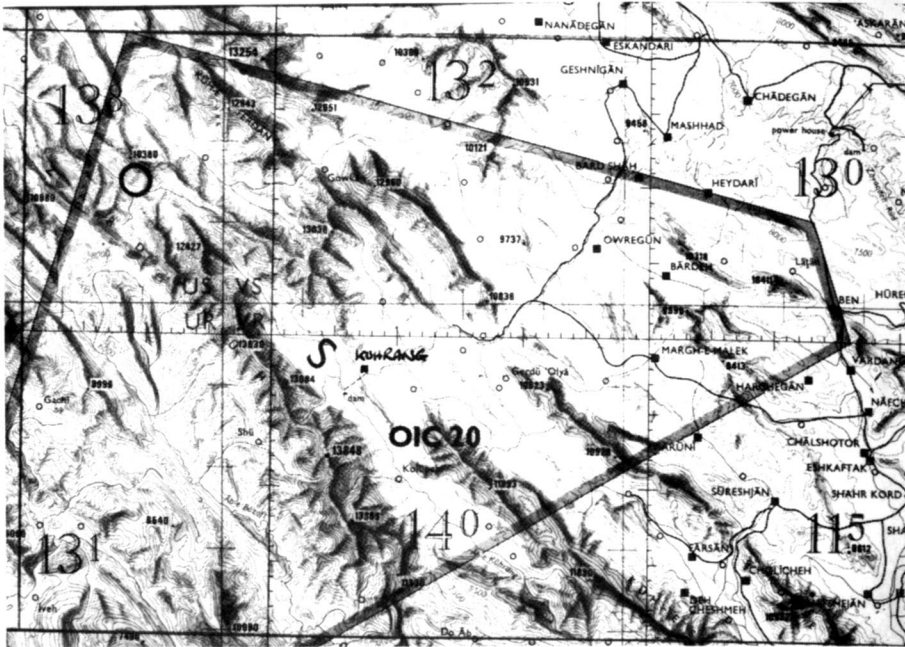
95 Pt 4106 on Kuh e Denar, Pt 4220 behind

snow can be found throughout the year, the amount depending on the frequency of the winter storms. If there has been a mild winter there will certainly be a scarcity of water high on the mountain in mid-summer.

It is possible to drive up a jeep track which winds up from Sesakht village to cross the central pass. It is in all senses a jeep track and it would be unwise to drive in a vehicle that does not have good ground clearance. In the early summer it may not be negotiable because avalanche debris blocks it above a spring which gushes out of the mountainside on the 2800m contour.

The routes on the mountain are countless and would offer a party with unlimited time a 'field day' of new routes. The 2 most regularly climbed are either up the broad ridge that starts directly above Sesakht village and thus gains the main ridge or by branching off the jeep track above the spring at 2800m. From there a steep and stony ascent swings up to the left into a large amphitheatre bounded by steep cliffs and heads for a small col at 3600m. The main ridge is gained easily from the col and followed to Pt 4302m. This point appears to be most popular and there are plaques and busts of the Shah dotted round the stone cairn on the top. The true summit of Denar is a further 8km along the ridge which, to the unacclimatized, would involve a very long exhausting traverse at high altitude. These 2 routes are easy and do not require ropes.

There is little recorded roped climbing on the mountain and it is probable that Denar still awaits a complete traverse. In the numerous visits that I made to Denar in summer and winter, I only managed to traverse from the central pass to the true summit and E from the pass to Pt 4220m. Time was my enemy and being used to working at sea level on the Gulf made things no easier. But for the party with time there exists the opportunity for all extremes of climbing, in winter and summer, in a truly wonderfully remote position.

96 *Zard Kuh*

Zard Kuh 4197m

Zard Kuh, or yellow mountain, is the name given to the range of peaks which lie about 150km due W of Esfahan. The range is about 40km long and like Kuh-e-Denar, consists of a series of interconnecting ridges with several peaks rising up above 4000m.

An approach to the mountain from the SW is most impractical as it would involve dropping down to the flat humid plains at the head of the Gulf and attempting to find a way through the lower desert mountains. By far the easiest approach is by asphalt and dirt road from Esfahan through Sharekord, Farsan and Kuhrang. The last named is a small village that sits astride the outlet of a tunnel that spills water from a dam on the other side of the hill. Kuhrang appears to be the end of the road but in fact a small jeep track emerges from behind the village and winds up to a small pass. The open bowl below the pass is cut by the river Kuhrang as it meanders SE towards a small gorge where the dam has been built. The track divides close to the pass with the left branch leading down to the dam which incorporates a footbridge. This is the best place to cross the river, particularly in the spring or early summer, and once on the W side one is at the most central point of access to the whole of Zard Kuh.

There appears to be an abundance of easy routes to ascend the range from the NE side and any general line can be chosen. Winter begins in the area in November and snow lies down in the valleys until the end of April. In the winter of 1977 there was little snow and the Zard Kuh was relatively free of it on the higher slopes by early April; but in 1976 following large scale falls throughout the winter, snow lay down to the 2800 m contour line as late into the summer as July.

This remote and very beautiful part of Zagros is the summer home of the Bakhtiari. They provide colour and contrast to the scene with their woven black

goat hair tents, their flocks of fat tailed sheep with attendant shepherds and dogs. High up on the snow-line among the rocks and scrub rest the yellow-grey wolves of Zagros which descend after dark in search of the straggling lamb. I once had the disturbing experience of meeting a pack of 7 and can only assume that, because I was above them and was able to hurl rocks and abuse at them, they were more alarmed than I.

Shir Kuh 4030m

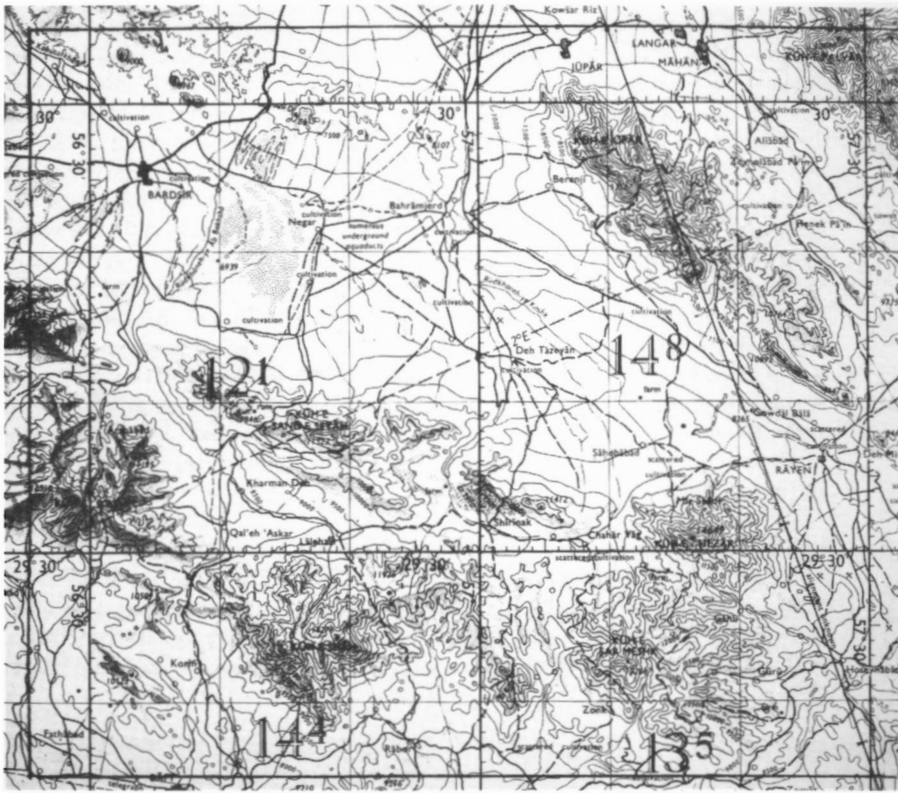
Separated from the main range by a long low strip of salt desert lies the satellite massif of Shir Kuh. Like most mountains in S Iran the name is not given to a specific peak but to several. Shir Kuh is the highest of 2 4000m peaks in the area. The mountain lies due S of the city of Yazd and is reasonably accessible to a good dirt road that runs SW across the salt desert to join the Esfahan to Shiraz road about 25km from a small town called Abadeh.

Throughout my stay in Iran I met nobody who had visited Shir Kuh and it is probable that its separation from Zagros reflects the lack of interest and knowledge of the mountain. Nonetheless the mountain is easily ascended on the W side up a reasonably defined ridge to the summit plateau. Alternatively a 6½km approach from a col due N of the summit can be followed but this is a much longer route and far less steep. The mountain is at its most interesting in the winter.

Yazd sits astride the main road from Tehran and Esfahan to Kerman and the S ports. For the overland summer traveller to Pakistan through the great S deserts, Shir Kuh would provide a cool and welcome respite from the hot, dry and dusty plains that characterize the S fringes of the Great Central Salt Desert.

97 The highest point of Zard Kuh





98 *The Kerman Mountains*

The Kerman Mountains

The ancient city of Kerman sits in a wide bowl surrounded by many rugged peaks which rise to over 4000m. It is probably these mountains that influence the climate in the area which, although in the S and only 400km from the Gulf of Oman, is known to be one of the coolest places in Iran during the long summer months. Just S of a village called Mahan some 50km from Kerman is the most jagged group of peaks that I saw while in Iran. This group is known as Kuh-e-Jupar and its profusion of sharp summits and ridges look similar to the Chamonix Aiguilles. No doubt there are climbs of all extremes of difficulty on this magnificent mountain. Further S and near the small town of Rayen is the highest mountain in Southern Iran.

Kuh-e-Hezar 4470m

Kuh-e-Hezar, which translated from Farsi means the mountain of a thousand, is best approached through the village of Rayen which is some 25km from the main Kerman to Bam road. A reasonable dirt track filters off to the right at the entrance to the town and leads to the foot of the mountain about 10km distant. An alternative is to approach from the S but the tracks leading to this side are long, confusing and in places very difficult to traverse.

There are numerous routes up the mountain and most have a starting altitude of 2800m. There is a small shepherds' hamlet called Zaroot Olya in a dry river bed about 10km from Rayen and this hamlet is centrally placed for the N side of Hezar. One km upstream from here there is a waterfall where a small track climbs up to the left (E) and leads to a steep ridge which gives access to the summit. By far the best and, incidentally, the most scenic route is further W near a village called Mir Shadi. A short walk up a dry river bed from this hamlet leads to a valley fork. The steep slopes above the fork lead up to a ridge which is fairly broad at first. It swings right (W) and gradually curves to the left (S) until it gains another ridge at about 3700m. Here the ridge narrows and goes up a few steep rock steps for 300m until it joins the main W ridge. This is followed easily for about 2km to the summit which is a small triangular point topped by a stone cairn. The W ridge forms the upper rim to an enormous corrie which is flanked to the E by the long and very prominent N ridge. In winter this corrie offers snow and ice climbs of varying difficulty up to about 1000m in length. During the winter snow lies down to the 2200m line and the whole area to the W of Hezar is a paradise for ski mountaineering in totally remote and wonderful terrain.

Kuh-e-Shah 4325m

About 50km W of Hezar is a village called Lahlehzar. This is the 'jump off' point for the normal route up Kuh-e-Shah. The N side of this large mountain mass offers many alternative routes to the summit which is the easternmost of the 2 major peaks of the mountain. The S side of the W peak is very precipitous and can be

99 Kuh e Taftan, normal route



reached by leaving the asphalt road from Baft to Kerman at or near the village of Karin. The mountain is not often ascended because of its close proximity to the much more interesting Kuh-e-Hezar, but nonetheless it is worth climbing to the summit for the magnificent views. On a clear day it is sometimes possible to see the hills on the coast at Bandar Abbas which is about 350km to the S.

Kuh-e-Taftan 4020m

This active volcano is the most isolated 4000m peak in Iran. Although for convenience I have grouped it with the mountains of Kerman, it is some 600km to the SE of Kerman and about 100km S of Zahedan in Baluchistan province. Zahedan is reached by good asphalt and dirt roads from Kerman over the S limits of the Dasht-e-Lut desert. From Zahedan the best route to the mountain is via Mirjawa which is on the frontier with Pakistan. Here the road forks at the petrol station where there is also a tourist inn. A right turn at this fork leads to Ladiz where the mountain first comes into sight. The road climbs gradually to 1500m and passes quite close to the E flank of the mountain before dropping down to a small village where there is a prominent Gendarmerie fort. Three km further on from the fort the road runs over a small stream (dry in summer) bordered by shrubs and scrub. Almost concealed on the right as the stream is entered there is a jeep track which bears right then climbs out of the stream bed and winds its way for 8km to about 2200m. If this track is missed, a visitor to Taftan is faced with a long trek over a boulder and lava strewn plain to the lower slopes of the mountain. The track ends in a pleasant valley which in December and January may be covered with snow.

100 Kuh e Taftan, central eastern couloir, with sulphur clouds



Good camping sites abound at the end of the track although there is no water. If this spot is reached in the early afternoon it is worth walking up a small track and camping at a summer sheep pen where there is water nearby. The altitude here is 2900m.

The mountain has twin cones and it is the E one which seems to be the most visited. The normal route goes up a series of rocky shoulders, some of which are covered with scree, and a line up towards the central Eastern couloir is followed. This couloir is flanked by steep cliffs which can be avoided by crossing diagonally over to the right before swinging back again. Alternatively the couloir can be taken direct but because the top part is active the climbing is made unpleasant by the sulphurous smoke that billows upwards. Numerous parts of the summit cone are also active.

Good opportunities exist for winter climbing but the season is short and snow disappears rapidly from early March. There is a fine E ridge which ends in a steep section that leads to the summit of the E cone. It is possible to descend over the pass that separates the cones and climb the W one. There are certain to be other routes on the mountain but there are no records or descriptions of them available, and they would involve a laborious approach march.

Scrub vegetation abounds on the lower slopes and in the spring there is a profusion of Alpine flowers which add colour to the harsh brown surroundings. Local Baluchi tribesmen move on to the lower slopes in the late spring to allow their animals to graze and to escape from the searing heat of the Baluchistan summer.

Summary

During the time I was in Iran I never met other mountaineers on any of the magnificent peaks that I have mentioned in this article. Yet one knows that many thousands of people of all nationalities transit the country on their way to or from India and Pakistan. However pleasant it is to be alone in the mountains, one can only surmise that this noticeable absence is partly because people are ignorant of the accessibility, variety and contrast of these mountains in what is predominantly a desert scene. I hope, therefore, that this article will serve as an introduction for others who find themselves in S Iran and wish to enjoy its mountain splendour.

Maps

1:500,000 Tactical Pilotage Charts Edition 2-GSGS Sheet G-5DG (for Zard Kuh)
 Sheet H-6BG (for Kuh-e-Denar)
 Edition 2 Sheet H-7A (for Kerman)

Note: Although these maps are UK service maps, they are obtainable through large map retailers.

1:500,000 Iranian Maps printed in 1953 in conjunction with the US Department of Defence.

Sheet 7449-IV Kuh-e-Jupar
 7449-III Kuh-e-Hezar
 7449-II Kuh-e-Hezar
 6351-IV Eastern Kuh-e-Denar
 6251-I Sesakht (Southern Kuh-e-Denar)
 6252-II Northern Kuh-e-Denar